Book Review

Renewing minds: Serving church and society through Christian higher education

David S. Dockery

B&H Academic, Nashville, 2007, paperback, 288pp., \$19.99 USD, ISBN-10: 0805444955

International Journal of Educational Advancement (2009) 9, 57–59.
doi:10.1057/ijea.2009.21

This book follows a substantively growing line of scholarly analyses on Christian higher education. The author, Union University President David Dockery, aims to offer a working introduction to persons interested in Christian higher education. His goal is threefold: introduce the idea of Christian higher education, promote Christian higher education and offer a guide to those colleges and universities wishing, as he puts it, ‘to be more intentional about their purpose’ (p. xvii). Although the book is not an exhaustive commentary on this subject, it does well to serve as a ‘guide book’ of sorts to both practitioners and newcomers to Christian higher education. The book is written from the perspective of a Bible-believing, evangelical Christian, and the intended audience is Christian readers. Although the book is a helpful volume for those outside the Christian faith, Dockery’s assertions are held together by a belief in Scriptural truths.

Dockery takes his readers through a progressive series of chapters aimed first at building a case for Christian higher education, then moving steadily through various stages of implementation. The book concludes with the author challenging practitioners to be proactive in their thinking on this subject as they lead their institutions. Readers with little understanding for the true nature of Christian higher education will appreciate Dockery’s introductory chapters for their attention to history and theory of Christian scholarship. Citing the seminal works of George Marsden’s *The Soul of the American University* and James Burtchaell’s *The Dying of the Light*, Dockery briefly traces the development of religiously affiliated education in the United States, discussing the differences among ‘Bible Colleges,’ ‘Church-Related Colleges’ and what he calls the ‘Systemic or Intentional Christian College or University in the

Liberal Arts Tradition' (p. 7). Discussing the nuances between these types enables the author to continue to make a case for the most latter of those options, stating, 'In thinking about Christian higher education, we cannot rapidly leap over the foundational issues. We need to think carefully and intentionally about the importance of integrating faith and learning as the essential issue for defining Christian higher education' (p. 8).

Midway through the book, Dockery begins to outline some of the early steps in accomplishing the task of integrating faith and learning. Aspects such as an all-Christian Board of Trustees, a core curriculum including a heavy load of Biblical literacy and Christian thought courses and a faculty who all adhere to a constant of Biblical truth, comprise the most basic requirements of the type of intellectual community the author is advocating. Dockery continues with his implementation plan by offering a five-block structure to build what he calls a 'shared community of tradition.' These blocks, based and developed off a passage in the New Testament, provide a substantive and powerful means of application for practitioners (p. 95). Dockery builds on this motif by suggesting that such an academic community is marked by unity, worship, service and a shared life. Most important in this chapter though is a section on the 'distinctive commitments of an academic community.' It is here that Dockery seems to bring to bear the underlying premise for his philosophy of Christian higher education. The three distinctives he offers – God's revealing of himself through Scripture,

Christ's redemption from sins and the Holy Spirit's regeneration, thereby enabling 'every aspect of thinking and living Christianly' – provide a fundamental frame of reference for Dockery's thesis (p. 116). From this point until the conclusion of the book, Dockery expounds on this 'theology of Christian higher education.'

The last part of the book has a distinctly evangelistic tone, specifically pointing out that Christian higher education is not simply an effort to separate the Church from the world, but rather that it is an effort to enrich society, and, as Dockery concludes, 'we need to ask for fresh eyes to see the potential role that Christian higher education has as the *means* for establishing a Christian presence in the world' (p. 149). The book finishes with a forty-page 'bibliography for the integration of faith and learning,' fulfilling the author's pledge to provide guidance and direction for those seeking to become more intentional about Christian higher education.

Dockery draws on a substantial array of scholarship on the subject of religious higher education, most notably research by Marsden and Burtchaell, but uses the Bible extensively as a means of building the case for and explaining the importance of Christian higher education. He adds to that a number of references to classical Christian thought from the likes of Pascal and Augustine. Such methodology makes sense, as Dockery's primary audience is likely to be Christian, and will greatly appreciate its use. Considering Dockery's audience of practitioners and newcomers, the book most readily delivers to the latter. Those presently

involved in leading and growing Christian colleges and universities will find *Renewing Minds* a refreshing read, one that affirms their notions of Christian scholarship and provides a great reference tool with Dockery's formidable bibliography at the end of the book. They are, however, unlikely to draw any new or groundbreaking insight into their work. Newcomers to the idea of Christian colleges, whether or not they end up owning the same philosophy as the author after reading, are likely to conclude the book to be a well-constructed, thoughtful and well-researched work. This book could well serve as a standard for introducing people to this concept. *Renewing Minds* is far from being an exhaustive volume on the subjects of religious higher education,

Christian scholarship and the history of the Church's influence on higher education, but it serves its purpose well of giving readers a basic primer on Christian higher education, and how to promote an ideal environment for its proliferation.

REFERENCES

- Burtchaell, J.T. (1999) *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Boston, MA: William B. Eerdmans Company.
- Dockery, D.S. (2008) *Renewing Minds*. Nashville, TN: B and H Group.
- Marsden, G.M. (1996) *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*. New York: Oxford UP.

Matthew S. Bryant
Covenant College, Georgia, USA